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SUBJECT: PRESIDENT TALABANI DISCUSSES KIRKUK AND ELECTIONS,
EGYPT, TURKEY

REF: 07 BAGHDAD 4204

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Ellen Germain for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) President Talabani told S/I Satterfield in a June 4 meeting that Iraq is ready to conclude arrangements for its proposed bilateral commissions with Egypt and Turkey, and said that early July would be a good time for Turkish PM Erdogan to visit Iraq. Talabani argued for staggered elections on the grounds of security and dismissed as unconstitutional the Turkish-backed proposal to define a power-sharing arrangement for Kirkuk in the draft election law. Instead, he said, the Turks should encourage formation of coalitions that would include representatives of all major ethnic groups in Kirkuk. Talabani said he would continue to encourage VP Hashimi to accept the proposed deal on cabinet members so that Tawafuq could return to the government. End Summary.

EGYPT AND TURKEY

2. (C) In a June 4 meeting with S/I Satterfield, President Talabani focused first on Egypt and Turkey, saying that Iraq must conclude its strategic agreement with Egypt and that both parties have agreed to "activate" the proposed high commission, to be headed by the two countries, foreign ministers. Talabani added that FM Zebari had confirmed this with Egyptian FM Aboul Gheit, and that Deputy PM Barham Saleh would follow up on completing the necessary arrangements. Early July would be a good time for Turkish PM Erdogan to visit Iraq to complete discussions on the bilateral oversight commission, Talabani said, adding that the prime ministers themselves will head the commission.

KIRKUK AND THE ELECTION LAW

3. (C) Satterfield inquired about the proposed Turkish-backed provision for Kirkuk in the draft election law currently being discussed by the Council of Representatives (CoR). The proposal, introduced by the Turkomen bloc, defines a power-sharing arrangement in the Kirkuk provincial council that would give the Arabs, Turkomen, and Kurds each 32% of the seats, with the remaining 4% going to small minorities. Talabani flatly dismissed the proposal as unconstitutional, saying that the Turks should instead encourage the formation of coalitions of lists that would consist of representatives of each of the major ethnic blocs. (Note: Registration of political coalitions (any two or more political parties/entities may decide to register as a coalition) has just begun under the auspices of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) and will continue through June 17. End Note.) Talabani then launched into a description of the ethnic composition of Kirkuk from 1922 to 1997, with a brief excursus into the three pre-1922 censuses done by the British, Turks, and Iraqis, all of which, he said, concluded that the Kurds formed the majority of the population.

4. (C) Talabani further explained that the Turkish proposal

was actually a misunderstanding of his own proposal that government posts in Kirkuk be allocated according to a 32/32/32/4% formula. Power-sharing in Kirkuk is necessary, he agreed, but will be very hard to implement under any circumstances, particularly because there is an insufficient number of Turkomen participating overall in government and the security forces. "But I think for elections we should look for coalition lists, and then look to power-sharing in government positions," he concluded, saying that he would be seeing Turkish Special Representative for Iraq Murat Ozcelik that evening and would discuss the issue with him and with UNAMI SRSG Staffan de Mistura the next day. (Comment: In fact, the proposal that government posts (namely directors general) in Kirkuk be allocated according to such a formula was part of an agreement reached in early December 2007 that brought the Arab bloc back into the Kirkuk Provincial Council after a year-long boycott (ref A). End Comment.)

15. (C) Kirkuk requires careful handling, even if it means the elections there must be delayed, Talabani cautioned. "You know, elections won't be on one day," he commented, and perhaps Kirkuk should be done last. Satterfield asked him to explain his reasons for supporting staggered elections; Talabani cited improved security, less likelihood of outside interference, and better ability to monitor each province carefully as elections take place. Satterfield noted UNAMI's opinion that single-day elections were better from the standpoint of security and preventing fraud, which Talabani acknowledged.

TAWAFUQ RETURN

16. (C) Satterfield noted VP Tariq al-Hashimi's continued reluctance to close reach agreement on accepting eight cabinet positions for Tawafuq, with the postponement for two to three months of Ali Babban's ouster as Minister of Planning continuing to be the sticking point. Talabani said he would continue to encourage Hashimi to accept the arrangement, and to encourage Babban to be more flexible.

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